
Know Who Is on Your Campus

*Access Control and Visitor Management
Systems Can Play a Vital Role*



**Education
Solutions**

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Introduction

It is all too easy to walk onto many of our nation's school campuses unchallenged. For many schools, a visitor management plan consists of little more than a voluntary sign-in book kept in an administrative office. The problem with that is the overwhelming majority of sexual predators, child abductors, thieves and other criminals do not bother to follow the rules.

Campus thefts seem commonplace. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, there were 2,265 reported thefts per day in kindergarten through 12th grade schools during the 2007–08 school year — nearly half of all public schools reported one or more thefts. Students, staff and the schools are negatively impacted by these crimes when the tools they need for learning and instruction are taken. On many campuses, it is easy for anyone to walk into an unlocked classroom during the day and check out which rooms contain the most valuable and saleable equipment, such as computers, printers and televisions. Many times, a person carrying a stolen computer could walk off campus unchallenged — even during normal school hours.

Late in 2010, two women entered an elementary school in Maryland while classes were still in session. One asked to use the restroom facilities, while her friend remained in the office. After the woman didn't return from the restroom for several minutes, the principal ordered an alert. All children were present, but a wallet belonging to a teacher was missing. By this time, the woman had fled. A short time later, she unsuccessfully attempted to use a credit card from the teacher's wallet at a nearby discount store. A properly written visitor management plan may have helped by not allowing the woman to wander about the campus unescorted.

In addition to theft, fires, broken windows, graffiti and other acts of vandalism also cause interruptions in children's education. Across the country, these acts cost school districts millions of dollars each year to repair the damage caused by vandals.

Allowing access to those who belong on campus — students, teachers, staff, parent volunteers and vendors — while keeping out sexual predators, thieves and vandals is a challenge facing virtually every principal, superintendent, board member and school resource officer (SRO).

With thorough planning and the help of basic access control measures as well as innovative technologies, a more secure school campus can be achieved.

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Implementing a Plan

As one of the first steps in protecting people and property, every school needs an overall access control plan, with visitor management at the forefront. An effective plan is one that is well written, well rehearsed and well enforced. A plan should include basic policies and procedures, which generally are inexpensive and easy to implement.

Here is a quick look at some of the most basic components of a good access control plan that incorporates simple, low-tech steps that add a level of protection.

- Campus entries need to be limited to as few as possible. Elementary schools should have only one entry for students, parents and visitors. While classes are in session, that entry should be locked. The entry should be opened 30 minutes prior to the start of school and closed 30 minutes after the day's last class. Middle and high schools may require a second entry due to their larger size and student body.
- A school resource officer (SRO) and/or member of the administrative staff should be stationed at the entry to monitor who enters the campus immediately before and after school (and during lunch if students are allowed to leave). Permit only known students and volunteers to enter, and escort all visitors to the office to register. During school hours, the SRO and the administrators should walk the campus to see that doors to all unused rooms are properly closed and secured.
- Teachers and staff should be required to wear a photo-ID badge at all times while on school grounds. This helps make it easier for children to spot someone he or she can trust in the event of an emergency. And it will be easy to spot other adults who have no business on campus.
- All parents, volunteers, vendors and other visitors should be required to register in the school office. Visitors should have a state-issued identification card, leave a home telephone number and state a reason for being on campus, and note arrival and departure times. A staff member should provide the visitor with a temporary badge to be worn when on school grounds. Teachers and staff should be instructed to immediately challenge any adult on campus without a badge. If the person refuses to leave, law enforcement or a security guard should be summoned.
- Involve parents, faculty and staff in the visitor management planning process. Then prepare a written record of the school's plan and provide a copy to every faculty and staff member. Take the time to discuss and practice it before the start of each new school year. Also, review the plan several times throughout the year to reinforce it to veteran employees and clarify it for new hires. Be sure to include in your plan what your staff should do in certain situations and practice with them various scenarios, including exactly what to do if an unauthorized visitor gains access to the campus or if certain incidents occur. It is also important to communicate the school's access control and visitor management procedures and policies to parents in order to set expectations. Again, a good time to do this is at the beginning of the school year.
- Signage on campus and especially at entries should help direct visitors to the proper entrance(s) and provide important information, such as office hours and the necessary credentials required to access the school grounds.

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Security Review

As a plan is being written, it is important to incorporate a security review of the campus. Schools present challenges unlike any other public or private facility, so it is vital to retain someone with years of experience in helping to protect campuses. He or she should be familiar with the latest electronic technology available and also understand the key role that less costly solutions such as lighting, fencing and landscaping can play in helping to control access.

It is best to start at the beginning — where individuals enter your school campus. Check the parking lot(s), making sure all areas have adequate lighting and fencing to help limit access to vehicles of faculty, staff, visitors and students (at the high school level). Then move around the building perimeters to ensure that landscaping does not provide easy hiding places for weapons and drugs. Your security reviewer will check the fencing and lighting to ensure the campus is effectively protected while students are in class and during nights, weekends and holidays. Then move to the main entry.

There, make sure that gates are locked during school hours. This not only helps to keep people out, but also helps keep the students on campus. The main public gate should have an electronic lock that can be opened from the main office after a staff member acknowledges the visitor. By their nature, high schools are more open, yet there is still no need for more than two public entries.

Shared community facilities, such as playgrounds, may be kept open to the public on weekends, vacations and during the summer break, but be sure that all school buildings and classrooms are secure behind fences with locked gates.

Once the security review has been completed, your plan should be well on its way to being written. Now it is time to evaluate electronic security solutions that offer a higher level of protection. While electronic security options may seem cost prohibitive, in reality many technologies are well within the financial reach of most schools.

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Access Control and Management Systems

Access control is all about controlling access to the school campus and knowing who is on the premises at any time — and that applies to people who belong on campus as well as visitors. A general access control program incorporates a basic system of card readers mounted at critical points on campus and the distribution of access cards to individuals.

Perimeter Entrances and Exits. For schools providing separate parking areas for faculty and staff, a card reader can be mounted at a gate to keep out visitors and students. Also, set aside one gate or door to allow faculty and staff with a valid ID card access into classroom areas or the main school building. The card readers will provide administrators with a record of which cards were used for entry, along with the times and days they were used.

In-School Facilities. That same access system can be used to allow authorized faculty and staff access into offices, classrooms, libraries, labs, gyms, auditoriums, cafeterias and storage facilities. Each of these facilities should remain locked when not in use. These areas should not be available for outsiders, or students, to hide in or commit criminal activities. Should valuable equipment go missing, the audit trail from the access system may assist in the recovery of the lost items.

Managing Individual Access Rights. Adding or subtracting cards from an access control system takes only minutes. By making the deletion of an employee's access card a part of the termination process, administrators can help make it more difficult for disgruntled former employees to regain access to a campus.

In 2010, a Knoxville, Tennessee, elementary school teacher became highly upset when he was told by the principal that his contract would not be renewed. The teacher allegedly walked to his car to get a gun. Police say he returned to the office and shot the principal, who remains paralyzed, and the vice principal. Fortunately, the students had been sent home early due to heavy snow in the area. With an access system in place, the teacher's card could have been immediately suspended, keeping him from re-entering the school until police or district security were present.

Once reported, lost or stolen cards can be immediately deleted from the system and replaced with a new card. An access system can pay for itself by helping to eliminate the need to pay for the expensive rekeying of locks. This can help save hundreds or thousands of dollars each year.

One of the main benefits of an access system is that it can help limit staff access at each school to specific times and/or days. The cards may allow access to all areas of a campus or just a single door. One-time needs can be programmed into the system for special events. Other changes, that may be required for an entire department, can be programmed into the system in just minutes. Long-term vendors working on a campus can be provided with cards that automatically expire when the job is due for completion.

In addition, an access system can work well for community organizations, such as youth groups that use school facilities for meetings in the evening or on weekends. Group leaders can be provided with cards that provide access only to authorized areas at specific times.



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Types of Access Control Systems. There are three types of access control systems to consider for a school or district — managed, hosted and traditional.

Managed Access Control. This option requires no time commitment from a school's employees. A vendor provides the installation of all card readers and control panels, performs data entry and issuing of cards, provides system monitoring and maintenance, and generates reports. At a time when many school districts are choosing to outsource legal, payroll and other professional services, the outsourcing of access control may make sense. It lets district or school personnel focus on what they do best. Providers of managed services can generally supply an end user with a more robust access control system — often at a lower cost.

Hosted Access Control. Much like the managed option, hosted access control involves a vendor providing an off-site server, along with the installation, monitoring and maintenance of the control panel and card readers. But the school or district remains responsible for data entry. This access control option appeals to schools that don't want the responsibilities that come with system ownership, such as server maintenance and system upgrades, but have the staff available and are capable of maintaining the system and user data as well as managing access privileges.

Traditional Access Control. With the traditional access control system, a school or district purchases the control panel, readers, servers and software to operate and monitor the system and then maintain the database. They may choose to service the system on their own, or more likely sign a maintenance agreement with a systems integrator.

Visitor Management Systems

Visitor management systems, another component of access control, can help restrict unwanted visitors from entering a school. The systems, placed in the office, are capable of capturing a digital photo of a person, as well as information from the individual's identification card. This information can be compared against the national sex offender registry or other federal and state crime databases. This process takes only seconds.

These systems can also take a visitor's picture and print a temporary photo-ID badge in less than a minute. This extra level of security makes it more difficult for someone to check into the office and then give the visitor's pass to another person. It is also easy to program local information, such as temporary restraining orders, into the system. Requiring pre-registration of custodial parents can also be incorporated into a visitor management plan. This will help prevent a non-custodial parent from coming on campus to take a child. A fingerprint reader or other biometric device can be added to quickly detect frequent visitors or employees allowing them to obtain a pass in less than 10 seconds.

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Controlling Access in Special Circumstances

Events

Sporting contests, concerts, fund-raisers and other special events can put a huge strain on a school's visitor management plan. The usually buttoned-up campus is thrown open to the general public, bringing hundreds, even thousands, of people to events that often take place at night — long after regular school hours.

Again, limiting access to a single gate will make it easier to monitor who enters and who leaves. For major events such as a high school football game, ask the campus SRO to get additional help from local law enforcement. Officers can be helpful by patrolling the campus, parking lots and adjacent streets before, during and after the event. Also consider the use of private security guards.

It is important to screen people entering the gate for use of drugs or alcohol. Anyone obviously under the influence should not be allowed access. Another good policy is one that states if a spectator leaves the event, he or she cannot re-enter.

Special events have also prompted the use of metal detectors to check for weapons as spectators enter the venue. To avoid the detectors, many troublemakers hide weapons in landscaping near the event facility. This is where good lighting and regular sweeps of the campus during the event can help head off potential problems.

And be sure that the campus's video surveillance cameras are monitored during these events by school personnel, private guards or a professional monitoring company to quickly alert law enforcement of any problems.

Early in 2011, a Pennsylvania middle school basketball game was delayed when a spectator noticed two adults in the stands with handguns tucked into their pants. The school's SRO approached and arrested the men without incident. The pair was charged with first-degree misdemeanors. The district superintendent said this was the latest in a string of potentially dangerous acts committed by adults at middle school sporting events. Metal detectors may have helped alert security, and they may have stopped the two men from entering the gym with guns.

With proper planning, procedures and the use of security technology tools, it should be possible for schools to welcome visitors, while still protecting against property damage and personal injury.

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Emergencies

Criminals can take advantage of the chaos created by an emergency to enter a campus with the intention to kidnap or harm children or steal property. Having a good emergency plan can help reduce these opportunities. Emergencies can range from a weather-related event to criminal activity in the area, such as an active shooter.

Some emergencies may require the campus to be totally locked down — with no one allowed to enter or leave the school grounds. An appropriate access control system can provide this function. If an evacuation is required, have a nearby place ready that can accommodate your evacuees, such as a park or house of worship. Have a backup site ready if weather makes an outdoor site dangerous. But be sure the campus is locked down tightly once everyone is evacuated and make law enforcement officials aware of the event.

Web-based emergency notification systems can also play a role by helping to reduce panic and chaos. By providing up-to-date instructions via mobile phone, email, digital pager, fax machine and wireless PDA device, those on campus will know what is expected of them. Parents can be notified the same way — or via landline — so that they can stay away to avoid further confusion.

In addition, new outdoor emergency communication systems are available that use intelligible voice technology to provide warnings and real-time information to people in endangered areas. These systems, which can be pole mounted or placed on a portable platform, utilize specialized speaker technology that can be clearly heard up to one-quarter mile away, broadcasting live or recorded messages to an entire school campus.

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Additional Helpful Technologies

There are other basic electronic security products that can be incorporated into an access control and visitor management plan to help enhance safety and security on campus.

Intercom Systems. Intercom systems allow office personnel to communicate with visitors still outside locked gates. Many systems also come with black-and-white or color cameras that allow staff to not only hear, but also see who is requesting school access. The camera can also capture and store a photo of each person — even those denied entry — which could prove useful in identifying anyone later suspected of a crime. Additionally, video intercoms are useful for remotely allowing vendors and contractors to access the cafeteria, loading docks, storage buildings and gyms. Depending on the situation, this can be a particularly good option and first step into beginning an access control program.

Video Surveillance Systems. Video surveillance cameras can be used to provide an extra set of “eyes” to monitor parking lots, building and fence perimeters, gates, gymnasiums and storage facilities. They can also help monitor areas within the school, such as the office, hallways, stairways, locker areas, cafeterias and libraries. Software-based video analytics can be used to create alarms when someone attempts to climb a fence or enter a campus in another unauthorized manner. Some security integrators also offer monitoring services — either around the clock or only at specific times — to report suspicious activity to local law enforcement. Also, recorded video can be viewed forensically to help identify suspects in criminal activities.

Notification Systems. While web-based notification systems and outdoor communication systems are typically considered for use only in emergencies, many schools have successfully implemented these systems for more routine communications. This is particularly true of the web-based notification systems that communicate through phone, email and PDA devices as described in the above section.

Metal Detectors. Use of metal detectors is not only limited to special events. A few schools are adding metal detectors to check visitors and students for weapons as they enter the campus on a daily basis. Whether walkthrough gates or handheld wands are selected, they need to be operated by trained professionals to gain accurate results and keep the flow of people moving during busy times.

Conclusion

Controlling access and managing campus visitors is all about planning, preparing and practicing. Anecdotal stories indicate crimes on school campuses cause harm to faculty, staff, students and school property. However, there are methods to keep our campuses safe from intruders without turning schools into prisons.

School administrators should no longer delay putting a strict visitor management plan into place. Far too many of our nation’s campuses are virtually wide open to sexual predators and other criminals. Using the proper mix of policies, procedures and technology, it is possible to know who is on a campus or in a school building at any given time.

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About ADT Security Services

ADT Security Services can help serve as a resource for school administrators as they begin developing access control and visitor management plans. The ADT Education Solutions team has helped thousands of K–12 schools, as well as higher education institutions, implement security solutions to help protect students, faculty and staff. ADT's total security solutions include intrusion detection, fire protection, video systems, access control, emergency notification and integrated systems.

For more information about ADT and to request a complimentary security review of your campus, visit www.ADTbusiness.com/education, or call 866.748.9158.



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